



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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one adverse criticism passing my aunts' lips about him or his exceedingly lax services, and I can hear their gently repressive, "My dear, he is a clergyman," when another niece spoke slightly of a rector in our neighbourhood.

Political feeling still ran high enough in our family to limit our dealing as far as possible with tradesmen of our own party, and so thoroughly was I imbued with its righteousness that I gravely asked (being about twelve) whether it was right for Miss So-and-so to have married a man on the other side. Many years before, my grandfather and a neighbouring squire had had a hand-to-hand fight over the possession of an unfortunate voter, who held land under them both, and who was being conveyed to the polling booth in one of my grandfather's waggons, having been previously decorated with the colours of our party, and though I afterwards knew the son of my grandfather's opponent as a most kindly courteous gentleman, I never lost the impression of his family being of a dangerous and pernicious class.

A few events stand out clearly in my remembrance of when I was a little girl—the thrilling interest of the Crimean war, the peace rejoicing after it; my first visit to the Tower and Westminster Abbey, the standing up beside General Tom Thumb, and the proud impression of looking down on him, the Indian Mutiny, and especially the welcoming a V.C. cousin with his "honours thick upon him;" the hearing of an oratorio for the first time when Jenny Lind thrilled even my childish heart (for I was only eleven) with her superb rendering of "On mighty pens," which no subsequent singing has effaced, my first Shakespeare play, in which Kate Terry forgot herself and made everyone forget her in her impersonation of Beatrice; my first visit to Kew, whose kindly curator was known to my Aunts, &c., &c.; but the greater part of my early life is full of the indefinable all-pervading influence of those stately loving and beloved ones who, like the "barren" woman of the bible, had "many more children than she which hath an husband," to whom I could take my childish joys and sorrows with the certainty that they would be sympathised with, perhaps laughed over openly and merrily, but always understood.

G. G. F.

EDITORIAL.

SHOW CAUSE WHY.

WE have been asking, WHY? like Mr. Ward Fowler's Wagtail, for a long time. We asked, Why? about linen underclothing, and behold it is discarded. We asked Why? about numberless petticoats, and they are going. We are asking, Why? about carpets and easy chairs, and all manner of luxurious living; and probably the year 1900 will see none of these things save the survivals. It is as well we should go about with this practical Why? rather than with the "Why does a wagtail wag its tail?" manner of problem. The latter issues in vain guesses, and the pseudo-knowledge which puffeth up—But if, Why? leads us to—"Because we should not; then, let us do the thing we should." This manner of Why? is like a poker to a dying fire.

Why is Tom Jones sent to school? That he may be educated, of course, say his parents. And Tom is dismissed with the fervent hope that he may take a good place. But never a word about the delights of learning, or of the glorious worlds of nature and of thought to which his school studies will presumably prove an open sesame. "Mind you be a good boy and get a good place in your class," is Tom's valediction; and his little soul quickens with purpose. He won't disappoint father, and mother shall be proud of him. He'll be the top boy in his class. Why, he'll be the top boy in the whole school, and get prizes and things, and won't that be jolly! Tommy says nothing of this, but his mother sees it in his eyes and blesses the manly little fellow. So Tommy goes to school, happy boy, freighted with his father's hopes and his mother's blessings. By and by comes a report, the main delight of which is, that Tommy has gained six places; more places gained, prizes, removes—by and by scholarships. Before he is twelve, Tommy is able to earn the whole of his future schooling by his skill in that industry of the young popularly known as *Exams*. Now he aims at larger game, "exams" still, but "exams" big with possibilities, "exams" which will carry him through his University career. His success is pretty certain, because

you get into the trick of "exams" as of other crafts. His parents are congratulated, Tom is more or less of a hero in his own eyes and in those of his compeers. Examinations for ever! Hip, hip! Never was a more facile way for a youth to distinguish himself, that is, if his parents have sent him into the world blessed with any inheritance of brains. For the boy not so blessed—why, he may go to the Colonies and that will make a man of him.

The girls come in a close second. The "Junior," the "Senior," the "Higher," the "Intermediate," the "B.A.," and what else you will, mark the epochs in most girls' lives. Better, say you, than having no epochs at all. Unquestionably, yes. But the fact that a successful examination of one sort or another is the goal towards which most of our young people are labouring, with feverish haste and with undue anxiety, is one which possibly calls for the scrutiny of the investigating Why?

In the first place, people rarely accomplish beyond their own aims. The aim is a pass, not knowledge, "they cram to pass and not to know; they do pass and they don't know" says Mr. Ruskin, and most of us who know the "candidate" will admit that there is some truth in the epigram. There are, doubtless, people who pass and who also know, but, even so, it is open to question, whether passing is the most direct, simple, natural and efficacious way of securing knowledge, or whether the persons who pass and know are not those keen and original minds which would get blood out of stone anyway, sap out of sawdust. Again,—except for the fine power of resistance possessed by the human mind, which secures that most persons who go through examination grind come out as they went in, absolutely unbiassed towards any intellectual pursuits whatever,—except for this, the tendency of the grind is to imperil that individuality which is the one incomparably precious birth-right of each of us. The very fact of a public examination compels that all who go in for it must study on the same lines.

It will be urged that there is no necessary limitation to studies outside the examination syllabus, nor any restrictions whatever as to the direction of study even upon the syllabus; but this is a mistake. Whatever public examinations a given school takes, the whole momentum of pupils and staff urges

towards the great issue. As to the manner of study, this is ruled by the style of questions set in a given subject, and Dry-as-dust wins the day because it is easier and fairer to give marks upon definite facts than upon mere ebullitions of fancy or genius. So it comes to pass that there is absolutely no choice as to the matter or manner of their studies for most boys and girls who go to school, nor, for many of those who work at home. For, so great is the convenience of a set syllabus that parents and teachers are glad to avail themselves of it.

It appears then that the boy is in bondage to the school-master, and the school-master to the examiner, and the parents do no more than acquiesce. Would parents be astounded if they found themselves in this matter a little like the man who had talked prose all his life without knowing it? The tyranny of the competitive examination is supported for the most part by parents. We do not say altogether. Teachers do their part manfully; but, in the first place, teachers unsupported by parents have no power at all in the matter, not a single candidate could they present beyond their own sons and daughters; in the next place, we do not hesitate to say that the whole system is forced upon teachers (though, perhaps, by no means against their will) by certain ugly qualities of human nature as manifested in parents. Ignorance, idleness, vanity, avarice, do not carry a pleasant sound; and if we, who believe in parents, have the temerity to suggest such shadows to the father basking in the sunshine of his boy's success, we would add that the rest of us who are not parents are still more to blame; that it is terribly hard to run counter to the current of the hour; and that, "harm is wrought through want of thought." Ignorance is excusable, but wilful ignorance is culpable, and the time has come for the thoughtful parent to examine himself and see whether or no it be his duty to make a stand against the competitive examination system. Observe, the evil lies in the competition, not in the examination. If the old axiom be true, that the mind can know nothing but what it can produce in the form of an answer to a question put by the mind itself, it is relatively true that knowledge conveyed from without must needs be tested from without. Probably, work on a given syllabus tested by a final examination is the

acquiesce

comes from "quiet"
to accept or comply passivelyrashness, rectlessness
unreasonable or foolhardycontempt of
opposition or
danger

condition of definite knowledge and steady progress. All we contend for is that the examination shall not be competitive. It will be urged that it is unfair to rank such public examinations as the Universities' Local—which have done infinitely much to raise the standard of middle-class education, especially amongst girls, and upon which neither prize nor place depends—as competitive examinations. They are rarely competitive, it is true, in the sense of any extraneous reward to the fortunate candidate; but, happily, we are not so far gone from original righteousness but that Distinction is its own reward. The pupil is willing to labour, and rightly so, for the honour of a pass which distinguishes him among the *élite* of his school. The schools themselves compete (*con + petere* = to seek with) as to which shall send in the greatest number of candidates and come out with the greatest number of Honours, Scholarships, and what not. These distinctions are well advertised, and the parent who is on the look-out for a school for his boy is all too ready to send him where the chances of distinction are greatest. Examinations which include the whole school, and where every boy has his place on the list, higher or lower, are another thing; though these also appeal to the emulous principle, they do not do so in excess, the point to be noted.

But, why should so useful an incentive to work as a competitive examination be called in question? There are certain facts which may be predicated of every human being who is not, as the country folk say, "wanting." Everyone wants to get on; whatever place we occupy we aim at the next above it. Everyone wants to get rich, or, anyway, richer; whether the wealth he chooses to acquire be money or autographs. Everyone wants the society of his fellows; if he does not, we call him a misanthrope and say, to use another popular and telling phrase, "He's not quite right." We all want to excel, to do better than the rest, whether in a tennis-match or an examination. We all want to know, though some of us are content to know our neighbours' affairs, while others would fain know about the stars in their courses. We all, from the sergeant in his stripes to the much decorated commanding officer, want people to think well of us. Now these several desires, of power, of wealth, of society, of excelling, of knowledge, of esteem, are primary springs of

action in every human being. Touch any one of them, in savage or *savant*, and you cannot fail of a response. The Russian Moujik besieges a passing traveller with questions about the lands he has seen, because he *wants to know*. The small boy gambles with his marbles because he *wants to get*. The dairy-maid dons a new bow because she *wants to be admired*, the only form of esteem to which she is awake. Tom drives when the children play horses because he *wants to rule*. Maud works herself into a fever for her examination because she *wants to excel*, and "to pass" is the hall-mark of excellence, that is, of those who excel.

Now these primary desires are neither virtuous nor vicious. They are common to us all and necessary to us all, and appear to play the same part towards our spiritual being that the appetites do to our material existence; that is, they stimulate us to the constant effort which is the condition of progress, and at the same time the condition of health. We know how that soul stagnates which thinks nothing worth an effort. He is a poor thing who is content to be beaten on all hands. We do not quarrel with the principle of emulation any more than we do with that of respiration. The one is as natural and as necessary as the other, and as little to be brought before a moral tribunal. But it is the part of the educator to recognise that a child does not come into the world a harp with one string, and that the perpetual play upon this one chord through all the years of adolescence is an evil, not because emulation is a vicious principle, but because the balance of character is destroyed by the constant stimulation of this one desire at the expense of the rest.

Equally strong, equally natural, equally sure of awakening a responsive stir in the young soul, is the divinely implanted principle of curiosity. The child *wants to know*: wants to know incessantly, desperately; asks all manner of questions about everything he comes across, plagues his elders and betters, and is told not to bother, and to be a good boy and not ask questions. But this only sometimes. For the most part we lay ourselves out to answer Tommy's questions so far as we are able, and are sadly ashamed that we are so soon floored by his insatiable curiosity about natural objects and phenomena. Tommy has his reward. The most surprising educational feat accomplished amongst us

is the amount of knowledge, about everything within his range, which Tommy has acquired by the end of his sixth year. 'Why, he knows as much as I do, about this, and that, and the other,' says his astonished and admiring father. Take him to the seaside, and in a week he will tell you all about trawling and mackerel fishing; the ways of the fisher-folk, and all that his inquisitive mind can find out unaided. He would tell all about sand, and shells, and tides, and waves, only, poor little boy, he must have help towards this manner of knowledge, and there is no one to give it to him. However, he finds out all that he can about all that he sees and hears, and does amass a surprising amount of exact knowledge about things and their properties. But, when Tommy goes to school, his parents find themselves relieved of the inconvenience of his incessant Why? They are probably so well-pleased to be let off that it does not occur to them to ask themselves Why Tommy no longer wonders Why? Up to this period nature has been active. She has been allowed to stimulate that one of his desires most proper to minister to his mental growth, just as, if let alone, she would give him that hearty appetite which should promote his physical growth. She has it all her own way. The desire of knowledge is that spring of action most operative in Tommy's childhood. But he goes to school. Knowledge is a pure delight to Tommy. Let his lessons approach him on the lines of his nature—not on the lines proper for certain subjects of instruction—and the little boy has no choice. He cannot help learning and loving to learn, 'cos 'tis his nature to.'

This, of presenting knowledge to Tommy on the lines of his nature, is, however, a difficult and delicate task. Not every schoolmaster, any more than every parent, is keen to give Tommy what he wants in this matter of needful knowledge. So, once upon a time, let us suppose, there arose a pedagogue to whom was discovered a new and easier way. The morning had seen the poor man badly baffled by the queries of boys who *wanted to know*. How was a man, who had pretty well done with fresh studies for his own part, to keep up with these eager intelligences. In a vision of the night it is disclosed to Cognitus that there is another and an easier way. The desire of knowledge is not

the only desire active in the young bosom. Just as much as he wants to know, he wants to excel, to do better than the rest. 'Every soul of them wants to be first in one way or another—first in games, if not in class.' Now, Cognitus was a philosopher; he knew that, as a rule, but one desire is supremely active at one time in the breast of boy or man. Kindle their emulation, and all must needs do the same thing in the same way to see who can do it best. The boys will no longer *want to know*; they will get their due share of learning in regular ways, and really get on better than if they were moved by the restless spirit of inquiry. *Eureka!* A discovery; honour and renown for master and boys; no need for cane or imposition, for emulation is the best of all disciplinarians, and steady-going, quiet work, without any of the fatiguing excursions into new fields to which the craving for knowledge leads. "How pleased the parents will be, too," says Cognitus, for he knows that paternal love, now and then, looks for a little sustenance from paternal vanity, that the child who does well is dear. Nay, who knows but our far-seeing Cognitus beheld, as in a vision, the scholarships and money awards which should help to fill the pocket of Paternus, or should any way lessen the drain thereupon. Here, indeed, is a better way upon which Paternus and Cognitus may well consent to walk together. Everyone is happy, everyone content, nobody worried, a great deal of learning got in. What would you have more? Just one thing, honoured Cognitus, that keen desire for knowledge, that same incessant Why? with which Tommy went to school, and which should have kept him keenly inquisitive about all things good and great and wise throughout the years given to him wherein to lay the ground work of character, the years of his youth.

We cannot put our finger upon Cognitus, and are pretty sure that he arrived by a consensus of opinion, and through considerable urgency on the part of parents. No one is to blame for a condition of things which is an enormous advance upon much of what went before. Only, knowledge is advancing, and it is full time we reconsider our educational principles and recast our methods. We absolutely must get rid of the competitive examination system if we would not be reduced to the appalling mediocrity which we see in China

to have befallen an examination-ridden empire. Probably the world has never seen a finer body of educationalists than those who at the present moment man our schools, both Boys' and Girls'. But the originality, the fine initiative, of these most able men and women is practically lost. The schools are examination-ridden, and the heads can strike out no important new lines. Let us begin our efforts by believing in one another, parents in teachers and teachers in parents. Both parents and teachers have the one desire, the advance of the child along the lines of character. Both groan equally under the limitations of the present system. Let us have courage, and united and concerted action will overthrow this Juggernaut of our own erection.

While upon this subject we should like to pay our tribute of respectful admiration to the present government for the splendid achievement of the "New Code." The demon of the competitive examination is practically exorcised from our primary schools. We no longer have every little flock divided by a black line into the sheep who pass and the goats who fail—the sheep made precious to the school in a money sense, the goats a cause of loss and heart burnings; the inspections, times of feverish, terrible anxiety to teachers and children, as to which side of the line each little candidate shall fall. All this has given place under the more mild and merciful New Code to the conditions of a genial inspection. All the children are liable to be examined, but not on the lines of *pass or fail*; but in order that the inspector may judge if every child is well taught according to his age and standard, and is advancing along the lines of character and conduct, as well as on those of certain prescribed studies. We believe that no such service has been done to the state for many a long year as this of the abolition of what is called "payment by results," in other words, of the competitive examination with its inevitable pass or fail. Enormous pent-up forces have thus been liberated in both teachers and children—forces which will, we believe, go to the raising of character, the ruling of conduct. As the chief concern of a State is the bettering of its men and women, it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this initiative. Shall those of us whose children attend other than primary schools be slow to follow so good a lead?

CHATS WITH NURSE.

BY TWO MOTHERS.

III. NURSERY ACCIDENTS.

"WHAT is the matter, Janet?" said Mrs. Ernest, as she entered the nursery, drawn thither by cries of pain and alarm, and the hasty summons of Anne, the under nurse.

Pip or Button up the Nose.—"Master Herbert has gone and shoved an orange pip up his nose, ma'am, and I don't know whatever we shall do to get it out."

"Take it quietly," said Mrs. Ernest, as she drew the boy against her knees and said firmly "Cease crying, Herbert, and the pip will be down directly."

"Oh, oh! it hurts," screamed the frightened child.

"Stop crying. Now, blow down hard," said Mrs. Ernest, as she placed her finger firmly and flatly on the opposite side of the nose.

But the pip did not come at the first blow.

"Blow hard again," the mother repeated, still pressing on the opposite nostril with an inch and a half of her forefinger. This time the pip flew as from a pea flirt, and the frightened boy looked up with a delighted smile—all pain forgotten—and exclaimed "Didn't it fly," and in a few minutes was at play again.

Mrs. Ernest decided that this was a suitable time for a chat with the nurse about nursery accidents, for, living in the country ten miles from the nearest doctor, it seemed necessary that Janet should have the knowledge which would enable her to act promptly in case of need during the mother's absence from the house.

"Are you at liberty, nurse, to have a talk about accidents that might happen to the children?"

"I'm all of a shake, ma'am, I got such a fright, but oh, ma'am, you're clever with the children."

Swallowing Buttons, Marbles, &c.—"Only because I knew what to do, Janet, and knowledge gives courage and calmness. Herbert has always been fond of trying to injure himself. When he was about three years old, he unscrewed a small brass knob, about the size of a small marble, off his